BRITISH COLUMBIA

Improving Access to Government Information for People with Disabilities

A Guide for Government Communications to Alternate Formats and Communication Supports

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Communications Planning For a Broader Audience

Introduction:

Incorporating the needs of a broader audience **that includes people with disabilities** should become a standard component of all communication planning. Providing alternative format products does not have to be expensive, time-consuming or complicated.

When a demand for a publication in an alternative format can be anticipated, this format should be prepared in tandem with the conventional materials. Consider immediate production of one or more alternative format products for material that falls within these categories:

- Information in the public interest where there is a duty to inform
- Essential or important information affecting health, safety, social and economic well-being, and legal rights and obligations
- Government communication with an audience that includes persons with sensory disabilities
- Material specifically of interest to the disability community.

Alternative formats of government publications and alternative communication support for audio-visual productions for the general public should be made available, upon request, within two weeks.

***Please Note** – attached as **Appendix 1** is a detailed list of Alternate Formats and how they can be used to improve the reach of your communication materials. Attached as **Appendix 2**, is a glossary defining a number of terms used throughout the document regarding alternative formats and supports.

The Planning Process:

1. What is alternative format?

Plan to include alternative communication formats in the preparation of any communications product and event to complement conventional print, audio and video communication products. The most common include:

- audio cassette – a publication read on tape
- large print – a publication using 14 point type or larger

- captioning – the spoken word in written text on the bottom of the screen, as in subtitles, or transferred to written text by a typist while a speaker is speaking.
- web-publishing – the Internet has great potential to improve the distribution of government information, and – depending on the design and navigation style of a web site – it can be accessed by persons with disabilities using specialized software programs.

2. How much does it cost to produce alternative formats?

Providing alternative format products does not have to be expensive. For example, if you are making 100 conventional copies of a two-page document, providing alternative formats would cost approximately:

• Audio cassettes	$450
• Braille (rarely used)	$220
• Large Font Print	No extra cost, if produced in-house
• Web-site	No extra cost, if created in-house
• Computer Disk	Cost of disk and distribution
• E-mail	No extra cost

3. Will we be flooded with requests for information in alternative formats?

The number of requests for alternative formats/supports is usually small and often the response is as simple as sending an e-mail or a disk. If specialized formats are needed (e.g. Braille), the Office of Disability Issues (ODI) can provide a list of qualified contractors.

4. How do we handle a request for an alternate format?

This guide is designed to provide Communications staff a detailed account of alternate formats, so that they can incorporate the needs of persons with disabilities into their communications planning.The Communications Branch at the ODI can assist by providing advice and assistance, but the cost of providing alternative format and alternative communication support is the responsibility of the individual ministry.

5. How can we economically produce alternative formats?

Consider re-directing a small portion of the budget for conventional print to alternative formats, or consider doubling up – this is when a conventional product and one of its alternative format equivalents could be one and the

same. For example, rather than producing a publication in both 9 point and 14 point type, produce only the large print copy. Similarly, the original copy of a video could be closed captioned.

6. Do all publications have to be made available in alternative formats?

If you determine that there is a need for a publication in an alternative format, it should be prepared in tandem with the conventional materials. Remember to promote the alternative format product the same as you promote conventional products, making sure it is clear how alternative format products can be obtained and providing a TTY number.

You can decide not to produce a publication in an alternative format in advance – but you must produce it if a request is made. Honour all requests for alternative format products and provide them at no cost to the requester if the conventional equivalent is also free.

7. If we are producing material in alternative formats in tandem with the conventional materials, which formats should we produce?

Audio cassettes for print and open-captioning for video are the most accessible for their respective audiences.

8. What do we have to consider for event planning?

Alternative formats and alternative communication support should be considered when planning any public event. There are a number of considerations, from sign language interpreters to assistive listening devices. As well, access to facilities and exhibit booths, advertisements, and the use of Assistance Dogs must also be considered. **Appendix 1**, attached, provides detailed information about all of these.

For more detailed information, assistance or advice about alternative formats, contact:

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Victoria, B.C. V8W 9K1
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Appendix 1

A GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES

I.) Alternative Formats for Print Materials

Alternative print formats include, but are not limited to, large print, Braille, audio tape, and computer diskette. Sometimes it is also appropriate to make the services of a "reader" available, where the material in a government report can be read but not reproduced or distributed.

Some people with disabilities may have difficulty reading or understanding text for a variety of reasons. Writing content in plain language (I.E., the use of short sentences, small words and the absence of qualifying or prespositional clauses) makes material easier to read and understand.

Large Print

Many people who have difficulty reading conventional print will benefit from large print, a format that uses font size 14 points or greater. Depending on audiences and the number of copies to be printed, it may sometimes be appropriate to have a conventional publication produced in large print for all distributions.

- The preferred size for body copy of large print publications is 14 or 16 points.
- Spacing between letters should not be compressed.
- Text should be flush left, ragged right, with no hyphenation.
- An extra amount of space between rows of type helps to increase readability.
- Arial (used here) is the preferred font. Fonts used should be easily readable, with "upright", differentiated lettering.
- "Italic" and "script" should not be used as they blur letters. Use underlining sparingly as it makes document scanning difficult.
- Use a mix of upper and lower case characters. All uppercase is difficult to read and should be limited to titles or headings.
- Black ink on a yellow or light-orange background (rather than a white background), or violet-blue ink on a white or very light colored background provides high contrast, which assists readers in distinguishing individual letters.

- For clearer scanning, text should not be placed over patterns, screens, textures or illustrations.
- The use of bright colored or glossy paper should be avoided as it increases glare.
- Regular type materials can be enlarged on a photocopier. If text is to be photocopied the original must be in an easy-to-read typeface and the reproduction must be well-defined and free of any visually conflicting background.

Braille

Only about 5 per cent of people who are blind read Braille fluently, but these users rely on it for communication. Braille provides the same flexibility as print does for sighted people and greatly enhances an individual's ability to quickly read material and refer back to specific sections.

- Braille can be produced in different reading levels – Grade One and Grade Two are most common. Grade Two is the most commonly used level, unless Grade One is specifically requested.
- Braille productions should be proofread as would any publication. When ordering Braille transcription, require proofreading as part of the service.
- Significant photographs, charts, graphs or other visual components in an original print product should be described in the Braille version.
- The Canadian Braille Authority maintains standards for Braille.

Audio Cassette Tapes

Producing audio cassettes involves reading material onto a cassette for playback. Cassettes can be produced in-house or by outside suppliers, depending upon the length of the material, number of copies required, and how tapes will be used.

If the material is a quick message to be heard by few people, in-house production would be practical.

If the material is intended for broad distribution, the use of a professional supplier is recommended. Suppliers are better equipped to provide duplicate copies and proper labelling. They will charge for these services plus studio time, narration and production.

- Audio cassettes should include a brief description of their content at the

beginning of the tape so that the listener can determine his/her interest. The description should include the title page, table of contents and the length of the tape.

- To avoid confusion, footnotes should be read as they come up in the text, not at the end of a page.
- If photographs, charts, graphs or other visual components are part of the message, include a description of them on the audio cassette.
- A low frequency tone can be inserted to indicate the changing of pages and chapters. This is known as "coding" or "tone indexing" and is audible only when the tape is in fast forward or rewind positions.
- Background music and sound effects should be avoided unless necessary, as they can hinder comprehension.
- A poor recording is equivalent to bad handwriting. Recording should be clear, accurate and understandable.
- The commercially available two-track format of 1 7/8 IPS (inches per second) is recommended.
- Cassettes should be labeled with the exact title, issuing ministry and program, and date of production. A Braille label should be placed on one side of the cassette and a large print label on the other side. Labels should include a number for each tape, the total number, and the side, e.g. Tape 2 of 10, Side 2.
- In the case of multiple tapes, do not provide a container for each tape unless you are prepared to label the containers in addition to the tapes. Multiple tape containers are available.

Computer Diskettes

Increasing numbers of people unable to read print publications have access to a computer connected to a Braille printer, voice synthesizer and/or large print screen. Diskettes are inexpensive and easy to produce.

- Diskettes must be compatible with the equipment used by the recipient. Considerations include formatting (DOS, IBM or Mac-based systems), diskette size, and diskette density.
- Material must be saved on the diskette in "text only" or ASCII format. ASCII format is preferable. Since ASCII removes many text enhancements such as

bolding and underlining, diskette files should be provided in both ASCII and a popular word processing program.

- Photos, charts and graphs in the original document require a text description.
- Diskettes should be labeled in large print and in Grade 2 Braille.
- The use of columns should be avoided on diskette files as most screen readers/voice synthesizers read text across the entire screen.
- Mail diskettes in padded envelopes to protect their contents.

Web-publishing

- By posting communication materials on the Web, the information is accessible to many people with disabilities. For example, people who are blind are able to read online, with the use of special devices. People with speech impairments can provide you feedback. People who are deaf can participate in online discussions without needing a sign language interpreter

***A separate report on improving the accessibility of government web sites is under development and will be available to Communication Branches in spring of 2001.**

II.) Audio-Visual Production Formats

People who are Deaf, hard of hearing, blind or people whom have low or restricted vision can benefit from audio-visual productions such as films, videotapes, television, slides, etc., when alternative formats and alternative communication supports are provided.

Captioning

- All audio-visual productions produced by or for government should be accompanied by open or closed captions or where appropriate, descriptive narration.
- Open captioning is preferred for films and videos, as not everyone who is hard of hearing or Deaf has access to a decoder (including family and friends).
- Captioning is not a major expense. It is usually under $1,000 for most videos.
- Video or television broadcasts which do not have a voice-over should contain a caption to inform the viewer of this fact.

Signed Films and Videos

- Signed films and videos include a sign language interpreter translating the audio into sign language in a corner of the screen. Signed films and videos can sometimes be complicated to produce since sign language does not use the same linguistic nuances as the spoken word. For example, buzzwords and slang often have no direct interpretation into sign language.

Sign Language Interpretation

- At a press conference, an information session, a focus group or a community meeting an interpreter can be used to stand next to a speaker and faces the audience.
- Sign language interpreters may be hired through local agencies who provide services to the Deaf and hard of hearing.

Descriptive Narration

Descriptive narration inserts a verbal explanation for action scenes, charts, maps or any visual component important to the overall message, into the audio track. Descriptive narration also voices written lists or numeric information such as phone numbers.

- This can be done when the original script is produced or may be added to a previously produced video.
- Descriptive narration enhances the ability of persons who are blind to benefit from the audio track of a video production.

III.) Planning For Public Events

British Columbians with disabilities who attend government public meetings, hearings, forums and similar activities must be provided with the opportunity to both access the facility where the event is being held and to participate in the proceedings.

Alternative formats and alternative communication supports are to be considered when planning any event to which the public is invited.

Access to facilities must include access to all places and services that attendees and presenters are expected to use.

Physical Access

- Physical access considerations must include wheelchair access into and within the building, good lighting, good acoustics and minimal background noise. Access Guidelines are available from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and are contained within the BC Building Code.
- Physical accessibility factors that should be considered when selecting the site for a public meeting include:
  - availability of appropriate parking
  - access to public transportation
  - walkways, ramps, entrances, corridors, stairs and elevators
  - accessible public washrooms, drinking fountains, eating areas
  - accessible public telephones (including TTDs/TTYs)
  - availability of nearby accessible hotel accommodations if overnight stays are required.

Warnings

- Warnings regarding known hazards and emergency procedures are to be made available in alternative formats and their availability and location are to be known to persons with disabilities who may need to access them.

Alternative Formats

- Alternative formats may include having materials distributed at the event made available in large print, audio-cassette, Braille or on computer diskette.

Alternative Communication Support

- Alternative communication support may include the attendance of sign language interpreters, oral communications facilitators, intervenors, and/or notetakers.
- Alternative communication support technologies include real time captioning and assistive listening devices such as an infrared system or magnetic loop system.
- These systems may be permanently installed in rooms regularly used for these events or rented for specific meetings.

Notices and Advertisements

- Notices and advertisements of public meetings and events must indicate accessibility through the use of the international "wheelchair" and "ear" symbols.
- These notices must indicate that alternative formats and alternative communications support will be made available when possible, and should include the phone number to contact to insure the availability of appropriate supports.

Assistance Animals

- Assistance Dogs are working animals and have rights of access to public places.
- The term "Assistance Dog" includes: any dog guide, hearing alert dog, seizure alert dog, seizure response dog, diabetic alert dog, wheelchair assist dog, or service dog trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability.

For more detailed information, assistance or advice about alternative formats, contact:

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#100, 333 Quebec Street
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Much of the material in this document has been adapted, with appreciation and by permission, from "Access to Government Publications, Meetings and Services. A Handbook for the Implementation of the Alberta Government's Alternative Communications Policy", September, 1995

Appendix 2

DEFINITION OF TERMS

These definitions are provided to assist those not familiar with alternative formats or alternative communication supports. The definitions are meant to provide information, not to define limits, exclusions or inclusions.

Alternative Communication Support – Communication support that complements the spoken word.

Alternative Formats – Formats that complement conventional print and video products.

American Sign Language (ASL) – A visual-gestural language composed of specific movements and shapes of the hands and arms, eyes, face, head and body posture. These movements serve as the "words" and "intonation" of the language. ASL is preferred by and used by the majority of North American members of the Deaf community.

Amplified Telephones – Contain a device in the handset that allows the user to adjust the volume of sound being received.

Assistive Listening Devices:

- **Hearing aids:** the most commonly recognized assistive listening devices. Not all hard of hearing people benefit from having hearing aids. Hearing aids are not helpful when the environment is noisy as hearing aids amplify all sounds.
- **Wireless sound transmission systems (magnetic loop system):** involving a cable that runs around the room. Speaking into a microphone fed into the loop allows sound to be converted for use by listeners with hearing aids adapted for this feature.
- **Infrared systems:** the signal from a microphone is converted into sound that can be heard through special receivers connected to special earphones or some hearing aids.
- Both wireless and infrared systems can be used for rooms or auditoriums where there is only one speaker. All speakers must use a microphone for listeners to benefit, something that is difficult in group discussions.

Audio Cassette – Audio cassettes are one of the alternative formats that may be requested. The process involves reading the material onto a cassette for playback.

Braille – Braille is a method of reading and writing using raised dots so that a publication can be read through touch. Grade Two Braille is the standard for persons who are proficient at Braille.

- **Grade 1 Braille** is the whole alphabet spelled exactly as it is letter for letter.
- **Grade 2 Braille** includes contractions and is the most commonly used form of Braille.

Captioning:

- **Closed captioning:** the audio portion of a video or television program is translated into "captions" so that the Deaf and hard of hearing can read what is being said. Captions appear as white lettering within a black box. Specialized equipment, known as a decoder, is required.
- **Open captioning:** text is placed directly onto the video and can be seen without the use of a decoder.
- **Real time captioning:** the spoken word is transferred to written text and appears on a large screen while a speaker is speaking. Persons with a good command of English may choose this method as an alternative to sign language. Real time captioning works well in large venues, with large screens that can be seen throughout the room.

Descriptive Narration – Spoken sub-text that describes the visual components of a film, video or other visual presentation. Descriptive narration also voices written lists or numeric information such as phone numbers.

Hard of Hearing – There are many types and degrees of hearing loss. When described as a disability, it implies some degree of loss that cannot be corrected with hearing aids.

Intervenor – A specially trained individual who signs "hand on hand" for a person who has both hearing and sight losses (referred to as deafblind).

Large Print – Print in 14 point type or higher. An Arial font is the preferred choice as it is easier to read. Large print may be readable by persons with low vision, including many seniors.

Learning Disability – A generic term that refers to disorders caused by central nervous system dysfunction. Such disorders may show up as delays in early development and/or difficulties in any of the following areas: attention, memory, reasoning, coordination, communicating, reading, writing, spelling, calculation, social competence, and emotional maturation.

Optical Recognition Scanner – Converts the printed word to computerized formats (text to speech). Persons who are blind or whom have low vision and whom have a computer equipped with a voice synthesizer may be able to access a scanned document.

Oral (interpreter) Communications Facilitator – Uses a combination of speech reading, mouthing and gestures to assist communication. An Oral Communications Facilitator is sometimes used by hard of hearing people when no assistive listening device is available.

Persons with Low Vision – There are many types and degrees of visual loss. When described as a disability, it implies some degree of loss that cannot be corrected with lenses.

Persons who are Blind – Persons with a visual acuity of less than 10 per cent. Persons with visual field problems including, but not limited to, loss of peripheral vision (tunnel vision) and loss of central vision are also considered to be legally blind.

Person who is Deafblind – A person who has significant sensory losses in the domains of both vision and hearing. (In terms of appropriate terminology many persons who are deaf-blind prefer to have the word hyphenated e.g. deaf-blind. Check with your audience to determine their preferred spelling.

Person who is Print Handicapped – A person who cannot access printed material because of a developmental delay or a learning disability. Some persons with restricted mobility are unable to use their hands or arms to manipulate books or papers and may require alternative formats for this reason.

Reader – a person who reads printed text for individuals who cannot otherwise access the printed word.

Sign Language – Visual-gestural languages composed of specific movements and shapes of the hands and arms, eyes, face, head and body posture. These movements serve as the "words" and "intonation" of the language. In Canada, the working languages of the Deaf are American Sign Language (ASL), English Sign Language, French Sign Language, and Language des signes francais (LSQ).

Sign Language Interpreter – An Individual with specialized training and education in the provision of sign language interpretation. Education and training in Sign Language Interpretation includes the study of American Sign Language, Deaf Culture, English, and interpretation theory and practice.

Signed Films, Videos and Television Broadcasts – Productions, either live or pre-recorded, in which a person is simultaneously translating audio into sign language.

Speech Reading – Sometimes called "lip" reading. People who experience a significant hearing loss in adulthood frequently do not learn sign language. Instead they rely on speech reading, which requires intense concentration and a clear view of the speaker.

The Deaf – Persons whose hearing is non-functional for the ordinary purposes of daily communication, and whose primary mode of communication is visual rather than auditory. Many Deaf people use sign language as their major mode of communication. In terms of appropriate terminology when referring to people with disabilities, the Deaf are an exception in that they prefer the term "the Deaf" rather than people who are deaf (the word Deaf, as in "the Deaf" is always capitalized).

The Deaf Community – Used to refer to the Deaf and hard of hearing who identify with and participate in the language, society and culture of Deaf people. In the Deaf community, American Sign Language dominates as the preferred language.

TDD/TTY – Telecommunications Device for the Deaf / TeleTYpe, which allows the Deaf or hard of hearing to use the telephone. A TDD is relatively inexpensive and can be used with most telephone handsets. Both sender and receiver must have a TDD to communicate directly. On modern machines, an LED screen displays the messages being sent and received. Some machines also offer a tape printout.